

From mountain to sea

# Doorstep Callers and Scams

## Bulletin No. 95

The articles in these bulletins are based on real life complaints made to Aberdeenshire Council's Trading Standards department, unless otherwise stated, to make them as relevant as possible to readers. Names, exact addresses etc. have been withheld to avoid identifying complainants and to comply with GDPR so please feel free to share the contents with friends, family, neighbours or any community groups you are a part of. For details of scams reported in other parts of Scotland please click on the [Trading Standards Scotland Bulletin page](#).

### **Bogus Callers and Rogue Traders**

A number of reports have been received recently about a group of doorstep callers operating in the Mintlaw area.

These 'workmen', while speaking to residents, claimed at one point to be part of Aberdeenshire Council; at another point claimed to 'have the contract with the Council'; and at yet another, to work for National Highways. They also handed out business cards with a Glasgow land line phone number and a postal address on them.

The workmen also claimed that they had tar left over from a Council job and were offering to fill up potholes and re-surface drives at domestic properties. Thankfully, none of the residents spoken to took up the offer.

Of course, these claims (even when they do get their story straight) are classic tactics of rogue traders.

Some points to consider:

- The likelihood of National Highways doing work for Aberdeenshire Council is vanishingly small. They are the UK Government owned body which is responsible for motorway and 'A' class road maintenance in England. Far more likely that these were rogue traders who were misusing the name of National Highways to lend credibility to their scam, deceive people and obtain work which would likely have been shoddy and overpriced,
- The status of the phone number provided is as yet undetermined. It is a real number but does not yet have a history attached to it. Initial



## From mountain to sea

investigations suggest that the address is terraced office accommodation, which is available for hire,

- Please be vigilant when contacted by any doorstep caller. Remember, you really know nothing about them so they can (and do) make all sorts of claims such as doing a great job, competitive prices etc. Instead, opt for the safer option, remain polite but resolute and say 'No, thanks'. Unfortunately, many people have found out afterwards, to their cost, that the claims made were just hot air,
- The chances that this tar was left over from any job related to or authorised by Aberdeenshire Council is slim to none,
- Take time to think whether the claims they are making are genuine and bear in mind it is unlikely that contractors employed by Aberdeenshire Council would cold call residents to off-load surplus materials,
- If the price appears too good to be true, it probably is,
- Most genuine tradesmen and women are so busy with work that they don't have the time to cold call residents touting for business,
- These 'workers' had vehicles with them so are unlikely to be operating in only one area. Please be vigilant that this type of activity is ongoing in your area,
- If in doubt and before parting with your hard earned cash, please contact Aberdeenshire Council Trading Standards on 01467 537222 for further advice.

Staying in the Buchan area, Trading Standards have also recently received reports of individuals in the Peterhead area who were going door to door, leaving paperwork at a number of addresses which advertised their cleaning services. These adverts also contained the contact information for the company concerned.

Enquiries by Trading Standards staff have raised concerns about this particular company. Checks on the advertised phone numbers are inconclusive as the numbers have not yet built up a history of consumer reports. However, the postal address given is actually a vacant address in Peterhead (so any dissatisfied customers going there would not be able to speak to anyone about their issues) and the company web page provided gives off warnings about 'grayware' (grayware is similar to malware but while malware is designed to compromise a device's security, grayware is most commonly created for the purposes of adware such as pop-up ads or it tracks user behaviour and slows the device down noticeably), so is best avoided.

## From mountain to sea

It was also noted that these people were using a vehicle, so may venture further afield from Peterhead.

Some points to remember:

- Flyers or adverts put through your letterbox are just another form of cold calling,
- As with any other cold caller, our advice is 'Thanks, but no thanks',
- If you need work done, speak to friends, neighbours etc and ask them if they can recommend a trader to you who's done work for them and who they were satisfied with,
- Alternatively, use reputable trader websites such as the [Aberdeenshire Trusted Trader](#) scheme or, if you live closer to Aberdeen then [Aberdeen Trusted Trader](#) scheme or the [Care and Repair Trusted Trader list](#),
- Please, don't go looking for tradesmen on social media sites as you may get recommendations from friends of tradesmen simply trying to help them out rather than genuine, satisfied past customers of these tradesmen,
- Be mindful that some trader websites are used by scammers and rogue traders to look for new victims. If in doubt, steer clear of both,
- For further advice on minimising risks when seeking a genuine trader, please see Bulletin no. 92 by clicking on the link [here](#),
- If you think you've been the victim of a rogue trader or are looking for further advice on the matter, please contact your local Trading Standards office. Contact details are at the end of this bulletin.

### **Scams etc.**

#### Investment Scam

One resident in the Banff and Buchan area recently saw an article on the internet featuring Sir Keir Starmer, then Leader of the Opposition, 'advising' people to invest in cryptocurrency, in this particular case via Ethereum/Ether. Ethereum is an online means of tracking transactions called a blockchain. Its cryptocurrency, Ether, is ranked second in market capitalization after Bitcoin. The actual transactions were to be undertaken via the online trading platform called Equistak.

The article promised great profits for following their procedure, with minimal risk, so the resident clicked on the hyperlink in the advert where he was taken to another webpage where he inputted his personal details, including his name, address and phone number.

## From mountain to sea

After this, the resident was allocated an 'advisor' who advised him to install the app AnyDesk on his device, to help explain to the resident what was going on with his investments and so that both could track them, which the resident did. The resident later invested a sum of several hundred pounds in Ethereum. A few weeks later he invested another, similar, sum.

Soon afterwards, the resident had a change of heart and tried to withdraw his money, only to be told that it would be 'against regulations' and that he had 'insufficient funds' to do so.

The resident later reported the matter to Trading Standards and to his bank and both are investigating the matter. In truth, this is a rather convoluted scam.

Some points to consider:

- Obviously, Sir Keir Starmer had nothing to do with this scam or any knowledge that his image was being used to lend the scam some credibility. He is an MP, now the Prime Minister, and his background is in law, not finance,
- Other celebrities such as Money Saving Expert Martin Lewis, TV presenter Ben Fogle and Twitter/X owner Elon Musk have had their images hi-jacked for similar purposes, again without their knowledge or consent. The recommendations attributed to these people are entirely fabricated by the scammers,
- Investing in any cryptocurrency is a highly specialised (i.e. highly risky) venture and should only be undertaken by someone who is familiar with that area of finance. It is also a highly volatile and largely unregulated area,
- Never invest in anything you don't fully understand,
- Please don't be swayed by any promises of huge profits, untold riches or similar, especially when there is little or no effort required by you; this is simply wishful thinking. Remember the old adage; if it looks too good to be true, it probably is,
- Ethereum, Ether, Equistak and AnyDesk are all legal platforms for those who wish to use them. However, the purpose of AnyDesk is to provide remote access to any device which has the app installed from another device, usually to solve IT issues with the first device. In this instance the resident shared his AnyDesk access information with his advisor, meaning that the advisor could access the data stored on the resident's device and could change or steal that data or block the resident from accessing his own device,
- Any investment advisor who asks you to install AnyDesk onto your device, for an 'investment' reason should be treated with the utmost caution and we strongly suggest that if you are asked to do so, that you



## From mountain to sea

take the time to consider this request very carefully and, if in the slightest doubt, end all contact with the advisor immediately as it is likely to be a scam,

- If you think that you've fallen victim to a similar scam, please report the matter immediately to your bank then contact your local Trading Standards office to report the matter and seek advice.

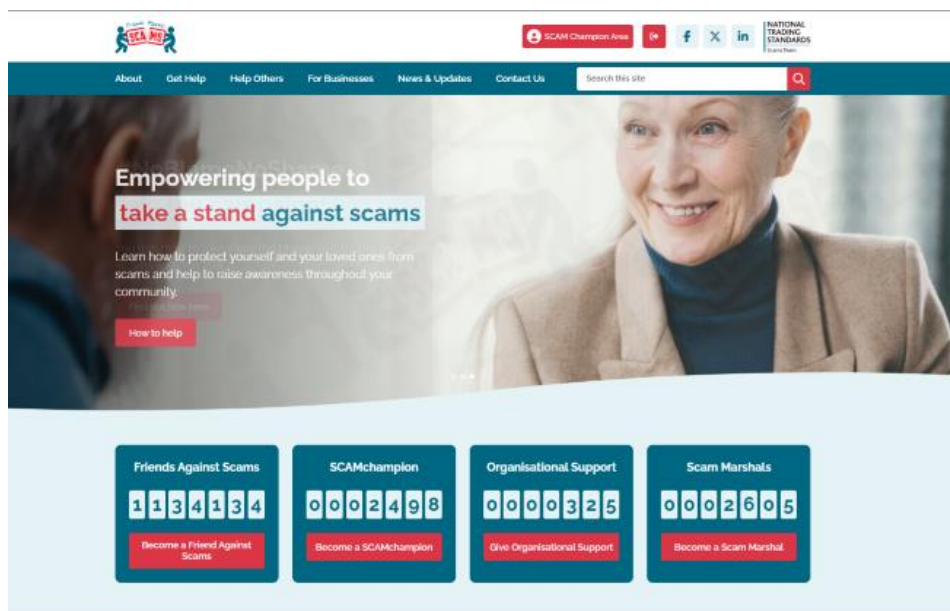
### **Misc.**

#### A Message from Friends Against Scams

Dear all,

We are thrilled to announce the launch of our newly redesigned Friends Against Scams website. You can explore the new site at [www.friendsagainstscams.org.uk](http://www.friendsagainstscams.org.uk).

Our revamped website aims to be a comprehensive resource for anyone committed to combating scams. The website has all the features of the older version with improvements made to the back end making it easier for the Scams Team to report on session completion, Scam Marshal sign ups and other reporting so we can continue to improve the site.



## From mountain to sea

### **Conclusion**

Please note that the advice given in these bulletins has been deliberately kept simple, so that if you are faced with such a scenario where fear, alarm and panic are tools often used deliberately by scammers, you will know what to do at that time.

If you have been the victim of a Bogus Caller or other form of scam, please report the matter to Consumer Advice Scotland so that Trading Standards can maintain a detailed picture about scammers operating in the Shire. This would be a great help to us to tackle this sort of crime.

If you have any information to share about the unlawful sale of tobacco or disposable vapes, please use the Contact Info below to pass that information to Trading Standards. If you would prefer, you can report the information anonymously to Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.

### **Contact Info**

For non-urgent Trading Standards enquiries in Aberdeenshire, please contact the [Consumer Advice Scotland](#) website or call them on 0808 164 6000. For urgent Trading Standards matters, contact Aberdeenshire Council's Trading Standards at 01467 537222.

Aberdeen City Council's Trading Standards department can be contacted by calling 0300 0200 292 or e-mailing [tradingstandards@aberdeencity.gov.uk](mailto:tradingstandards@aberdeencity.gov.uk)

Contact Police Scotland on 999 if you need urgent Police assistance or 101 for non-urgent matters.

For more information about scams please visit the [Friends Against Scams website](#) or [Take Five](#) at their website.

Please direct any media queries to [news@aberdeenshire.gov.uk](mailto:news@aberdeenshire.gov.uk) or 01467 538222 during office hours.

All previous Trading Standards bulletins can be found on the Aberdeenshire Council website on the [Trading Standards Scams Bulletin page](#).